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Part 1: News Analysis

The official state media of Turkmenistan declared President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov's trip to the U.S. a tremendous success. Although his speech at the UN General Assembly was overshadowed by other world figures, the Turkmen leader was able to gain a personal endorsement of the new UN-sponsored Center for Preventive Diplomacy in Ashgabat in a meeting with Secretary General Ban Ki Moon September 28, a major highlight of his some 20 meetings with dignitaries. The Center is praised as the flower of the president's foreign policy efforts, and is expected to engage regional and international actors on issues of security and stability.

The Turkmen leader was not given a state visit in the U.S., although the official website endeavored to turn a brief handshake and greeting from President George Bush into a warm endorsement of Turkmenistan's policy of peace and regional stability. And while the Turkmen leader met with a number of influential business people, no major oil or gas deal was declared; the only meeting discussed in detail was a talk with Robert Murphy, head of Midland Oil and Gas who expressed his company's willingness to explore the potential of oil and gas reserves and to send experts to Turkmenistan, but received only a general statement of openness in principal to cooperation "on the basis of mutual benefit". The only specific proposal Berdymukhamedov made to U.S. business leaders was the now standard boilerplate invitation to invest in the president's pet project, the Avaza tourist complex in the Caspian resort city of Turkmenbashi.

Back home, the Turkmen leader resumed his punishing schedule of foreign diplomacy with a wide variety of interested neighbours and potential strategic partners. Berdymukhamedov received the new ambassador from India, who hopes to gain support for the construction of a pipeline through Afghanistan to serve India's growing energy needs and who promised to build an information technology center to also to "disseminate accurate information about Turkmenistan's reforms". The president expects to travel to India early next year. An American military delegation arrived for talks on security. The EU's Foreign Policy and Security Envoy Xavier Solana, with whom Berdymukhamedov met in New York, expects to travel to Ashgabat later this month to prepare for the president's trip to Brussels. The Turkmen leader received Russia's Vice Premier Sergei Naryshkin but news of a possible date for signing of the Caspian pipeline agreement was still not forthcoming. President Berdymukhamedov headed to Dushanbe for a CIS summit and meeting with Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon, and the Tajik government hoped the bilateral talks would improve economic cooperation.

The prominent celebration of the 16th anniversary of the establishment of Turkmenistan's Ministry of National Security was a reminder of ongoing authoritarian rule. The president's claim that this abusive institution was responsible for "maintaining civic accord in the society, unity and consolidation of the people" rang hollow given serious human rights concerns which are likely to remain given the president's ringing denunciations in the speech. "In our democratic and legal state there is no place for traitors of Motherland, those who through slander and calumny try to undermine the foundations of our state, for embezzlers of public property and bribe-takers, for

those who cause damage to the health of the nation through drug smuggling, for those slow down the economic development by illegally exports goods,” he warned.

The pardon of 9,000 prisoners, decreed October 2, evidently does not include a number of prominent political prisoners – even those whose terms are coming to an end, the Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights reported on its website. According to a Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe report, in a reply to a query from a student at Columbia University when he was in New York, President Berdymukhamedov reportedly confirmed that jailed former Foreign Minister Boris Shikhmuradov and Batyr Berdyev, another opponent of former president Sapurmurat Niyazov were alive. No independent confirmation of this statement has been made. Shikhmuradov and others were accused of plotting a coup to overthrow Niyazov in 2002, were imprisoned after closed trials and have not been seen by families since then. Their names are not included in the list of those amnestied by the October 2 decree.

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1. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

a. Turkmen President Makes Official Visit to Tajikistan

Source: TASS/10/4/07. *Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project*

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov began a two-day official visit to Turkmenistan October 4-5 to attend the CIS summit and meet with Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon, TASS reported. Tajik authorities consider the visit "a real breakthrough in Tajik Turkmen relations, which were actually frozen in the post-Soviet period," a spokesman from the Tajik Foreign Ministry was quoted as saying

The Tajik Foreign Ministry said foreign trade barely exceeded US \$32 million, but with the high-level talks, further cooperation is hoped in the area of the supply of Turkmen electric power to Tajikistan as well as Turkmen investment in mining, hydro-energy and other projects. The Turkmen leader visited farms and vineyards and an aluminum plant.

b. President of Turkmenistan Receives Vice-Premier of the Government of Russia

Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: Official website of the Government of Turkmenistan/10/03/07

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/en/?idr=1&id=071004c>

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov received Sergei Naryshkin, Vice Premier of the government of the Russian Federation and co-chair of the Turkmen Russian Intergovernmental Commission, who was in Ashgabat for a session of the Russian-Turkmenistan Commission for Economic Cooperation. During the meeting, the prospects for Turkmen-Russian collaboration in the fuel and energy sector were discussed, in particular regarding the gas transportation network. Another round of talks will be held in Ashgabat with experts from Turkmenistan, Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to draft intergovernmental agreements.

The two sides also discussed cooperation in the humanitarian sphere, as 76 young Turkmen have been given the opportunity to study in Russia at the initiative of Russia's leading companies. The CIS summit in Dushanbe was also discussed.

c. Russian Vice Premier Travels to Ashgabat for Russian-Turkmen Commission

Original title: Russian Vice Premier Naryshkin Arrives in Ashgabat on Working Visit. *Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: ITAR-TASS/10/03/07

Full version: <http://www.itar-tass.com/eng/level2.html?NewsID=11928115&PageNum=0>

Synopsis: Russian Vice Prim Minister Sergei Naryshkin arrived in Ashgabat on a working visit as co-chairman of the Russian-Turkmenistan Commission for Economic Cooperation, and will hold talks with Rashid Meredov, Vice Premier and Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan, ITAR-TASS reported.

The Russian delegation includes officials from the Russian Foreign Ministry as well as Union of Oil and Gas Industrialists, along with Lukoil, Kamaz, Stroitransgaz and MTS. Naryshkin and Meredov will preside over a ceremony seeing off 75 Turkmen students to Russia for studies at oil and gas universities. The bilateral agreement for training these specialists was the first agreement after a five-year hiatus in the work of the Russian-Turkmenistan Commission.

d. Turkmen President Receives Ambassador of India

Source: Official Turkmen Government website/10/01/07

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/?idr=1&id=071001c>

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov of Turkmenistan received the ambassador of India, Mohammed Afzal and handed him his credentials. He accepted the invitation to make a state visit to India, and said he would like to travel early next year with a delegation. He noted the existing fruitful cooperation of Turkmenistan and India, in such joint projects as the pharmaceutical industry.

Amb. Afzal, who is a prominent journalist and educator, expressed admiration for Turkmenistan and its capital and congratulated President Berdymukhamedov for his successful trip to New York, and for the first eight months of his presidency, when he has accomplished a lot. The Indian envoy informed President Berdymukhamedov about his government's interest in Turkmenistan's participation in a project to build a Trans-Afghan pipeline to export Turkmen oil and gas to meet growing consumer demand domestically in India. Cooperation in agriculture, education, and cultural exchange was also discussed, with plans to conduct international conferences and symposia with the participation of scientists and specialists in both countries. President Berdymukhamedov invited India to take part in Avaza, the Caspian coast tourist zone. The Indian envoy also proposed opening up a center for information technology in Ashgabat and said he would make every effort to "distribute the most objective and accurate information about the dynamically developing Turkmenistan."

e. Environmental NGOs and Experts Concerned about Turkmenistan's Oil, Gas

Original title: Turkmenistan: Environmentalists Concerned About Oil, Gas.

Source: RFE/RL/09/27/07/ Copyright (c) 2007. RFE/RL, Inc. Excerpt prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project. Reprinted with the permission of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 1201 Connecticut Ave., N.W. Washington DC 20036.

Full version: <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/09/cf4addb0-dd3e-4298-a9b1-276e6cd364e5.html>

Excerpt: Kate Watters, executive director of the Virginia-based nongovernmental environmental organization Crude Accountability, tells RFE/RL that Western energy companies and governments are eager to seize on Ashgabat's opening up to the world. "Turkmenistan is the last frontier for hydrocarbon investment in the Caspian region," she says. "The other Caspian countries -- particularly Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan -- have really been the focus of a lot of targeted Western oil and gas investment not only by the major international oil companies but also by the international finance institutions that provide financing to those companies." Last week alone, at least two Western governmental delegations -- from Britain and Austria -- visited Turkmenistan for talks on cooperation in the oil and gas industry.

[Passages omitted on Berdymukhamedov's trip to the U.S. and meetings with U.S. officials and oil companies.]

In a report released September 12, Crude Accountability listed lessons that could be learned from the massive investment made in other areas of the Caspian. Watters says these investments often were made to the detriment of local communities, particularly in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. "If we look at the north Caspian, where the Kashagan, the Karachaganak, or [the] Tengiz [fields were] developed, there's been very serious environmental violations, excess emissions into the atmosphere of toxins," Watters says. "Communities around some of these oil fields are suffering environmental health problems. There are communities where as many as half of the residents are chronically ill from exposure to toxins. And this is where Western corporations are operating."

[Passages omitted on threat by energy development to endangered fish such as surgeon and seals, and risk to hundreds of thousands of birds and more than 40 mammal species in the Krasnovodsk Nature Reserve, and call on companies to avoid exploration in these areas and to publicize production-sharing agreements.]

"Currently production-sharing agreements are not open documents," she says. "And we think it should be so that it's clear what sort of investments are being made and also what environmental and social protections need to be put in place to secure the environment and the health of the people living around the investment areas."

Aylkhan Artyqbaev from the Kazakh nongovernmental organization For National Ecology tells RFE/RL that authorities should better control the energy companies' work. "There is no thorough control on behalf of the state, which leads to extraordinary situations," says Artyqbaev. "I think this is the main reason for the [ecological] problems the region is facing." Telman Zeynalov is the president of the National Ecological Forecasting Center, an Azerbaijani NGO. He hopes a strong civil society will allow Turkmenistan to avoid the mistakes made in his country. "There is a huge difference between the former and current president of Turkmenistan," Zeynalov says. "I don't know enough about [the government's] current ecological policy, but it would be good if they create good conditions for the development of civil society in Turkmenistan in order to monitor the ecological situation. In Azerbaijan, we haven't achieved this yet." According to Crude Accountability, very few NGOs exist in Turkmenistan due to the country's "highly repressive" political system.

f. U.S. President George Bush Greets Turkmen Leader at UN

Original title: *New York Welcomes Turkmenistan's Initiatives. Translation and synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: *Official website of Government of Turkmenistan/09/30/07*

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/?idr=4&id=070928a>

Synopsis: The official government website of Turkmenistan deemed President Berdymukhamedov's trip to New York "a historical breakthrough" which brought Turkmenistan "to the front line of global development." The trip illustrated a "vigorous and progressive leader" who has turned his country to a "new quality of life" since coming to power 7 months ago. The site characterized audiences in New York as hearing the Turkmen leader "with intense interest" as Turkmenistan's declarations for cooperation were offered. Turkmenistan's voice was heard, said the government news service, "in New York and the entire America, where world history was being made".

The official web site highlighted the fact that while not stipulated by protocol, a meeting of Berdymukhamedov and President George Bush did take place. "The U.S. leader considered it necessary to greet Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, who arrived in the United States for the first time as the head of independent neutral Turkmenistan and whose policy the United States welcomed and, moreover, regarded as an important factor for further harmonizing interest in the practical perspective," the government's web site noted. "George Bush affirmed it when shaking hands with the President of Turkmenistan, symbolizing friendliness and mutual readiness to work together to tackle the challenges the world faced nowadays," the official site said.

g. EU Foreign Policy Envoy to Visit Turkmenistan

Source: *turkmenistan.ru/09/28/07. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project*

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=11162&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov and EU Foreign Policy and Security Envoy Xavier Solana met in New York during the UN General Assembly, the State News Agency (TDH) reported. The two sides "expressed satisfaction with the high level of dialogue developing between Turkmenistan and the EU," reported TDH. Solana will travel to Ashgabat later in October to prepare for a visit by President Berdymukhamedov to Brussels which will be later in the year.

2. DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

a. Turkmen President Says Imprisoned Foreign Minister Still Alive

Original Title: Turkmenistan: President Urged To Continue Moving Forward On Human Rights

Source: RFE/RL/09/27/07/ Copyright (c) 2007. RFE/RL, Inc. Excerpt prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project. Reprinted with the permission of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 1201 Connecticut Ave., N.W. Washington DC 20036.

Full version: <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/09/749357BB-0265-41A3-B88A-A920F447827C.html>

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov confirmed that former Foreign Minister Boris Shikhmuradov is alive during a talk to students in New York, RFE/RL reported. This gave hope to Shikhmuradov's family and those of many other prisoners.

[Passage Omitted on meeting at Columbia University and pardoning of 9,000 political prisoners']

Berdymukhamedov also shed light on the fate of Turkmenistan's most prominent political prisoner, former Foreign Minister Boris Shikhmuradov. Shikhmuradov was charged with masterminding the alleged assassination attempt on Niyazov in November 2002. The fate of Shikhmuradov and another opponent of Niyazov, Batyr Berdyev, have been unknown since their imprisonment. Many feared they had died in prison. In response to a student's question, Berdymukhamedov said he is "positive" the two men are alive.

That statement brought hope to the two men's families. Bairam Shikhmuradov is Boris Shikhmuradov's son and also a leader of the unregistered Republican Party of Turkmenistan. He told RFE/RL from Moscow that he had not seen his father since late 2002. He and his relatives have tried many times to find information about Boris Shikhmuradov, but all attempts have failed. Shikhmuradov says Berdymukhamedov became the first Turkmen official to openly answer questions about Shikhmuradov and Berdyev, although he did not actually mention the men by name.

"The last time they were mentioned was by Niyazov some four years ago," Shikhmuradov says. "During Niyazov's meeting in Ashgabat with the diplomatic corps, this issue was raised. And Niyazov said, 'They will be in prison. They will be denied visits for five years. After five years, visits will be allowed.' " Shikhmuradov says Turkmen authorities had refused to give any information about the men and have pretended that neither the men nor the cases ever existed.

[Passage omitted on uncertainty of who is included in the releases. the appeal to Condoleezza Rice to raise the case of Ogulsapar Muradova, a journalist who died in custody last year, and the visit to Turkmenistan on the U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom (CIRF).]

Bairam Shikhmuradov says the release of the political prisoners is a genuine step toward a political liberalization in the country. "I strongly object to those who have said this step by President Berdymukhamedov was only window-dressing," he says. "Eleven people were in prison for some five years. They were tortured there. God knows what else they experienced. And those people returned home. It is not just window-dressing. It is a real act. It is the first step the new authorities have taken in order to put an end to Turkmenistan's catastrophic human-rights situation." Shikhmuradov adds that the Turkmen president has so far looked indecisive and needs to take more practical steps to support his declarations about improving the country's human-rights record.

[Passage omitted on U.S. CIRF position that releases should take place on the condition of a pardon, but rather a full rehabilitation.]

b. President of Turkmenistan Passes Decree on Pardon of Persons Sentenced to Imprisonment

Translation prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: Website of the Government of Turkmenistan/09/30/07

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/?idr=1&id=070930a>

Synopsis: The President of Turkmenistan has passed the Decree on the Pardon of Persons Sentenced to Imprisonment in honor of the sacred day, Gadyr Gidjes, and also to mark the 16th anniversary of Turkmenistan's independence.

The lists of persons released from further serving of their basic punishment, and also additional punishment in the form of imposition of mandatory residence in certain localities will be published October 1 in central newspapers.

c. Turkmen Human Rights Group Publishes List of Pardoned

Original title: Complete List of Those Pardoned. *Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: Turkmen Human Rights Initiative/10/02/07.

Full version: <http://www.chrono-tm.org/?0251043444000000000000011000000>

Synopsis: The Turkmenistan Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR) has published the full list of those pardoned on its website, TIHR reported. The list does not contain the names of former Foreign Minister Boris Shikhmuradov and other prominent political prisoners.

d. Turkmen State Performs "Action of Humanity and Mercy" to Release 9,013 Prisoners

Original title: Action of Humanity and Mercy

Source: Official website of the Government of Turkmenistan/10/3/07.

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/en/?idr=7&id=071003a>

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov has signed an amnesty decree in honor of the religious holiday Gadyr Gijes, the official government website reported. "As a full member of the international community, Turkmenistan develops genuinely the democratic and legal foundation of national statehood. The individual, human rights and freedoms are the fundamental value of our society. Today, the individual is the priority of the national policy," the State News Agency (TDH) reported on the official website.

The amnesty has taken place each since 1999, in order to "give those who took a false step and repent sincerely of their misdeeds, an opportunity to start a new life," the website commented. "The noble action of mercifulness was dictated by the intention not to punish but help those who took a false step, to give them a chance to be worth of the destiny of the native land."

The website notes that the holiday will be celebrated on October 7 this year, and that 9,013 persons sentenced to imprisonment, including 158 foreign nationals, will "return to peaceful life and constructive labor." The Office of the Prosecutor General has performed "significant and thorough work" to prepare for the amnesty, says the web site. A commission established earlier this year by President Berdymukhamedov, made of the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Office of the Prosecutor General, and the Supreme Court of Turkmenistan has been reviewing cases. Since July, local commissions have been investigating the personal files of those imprisoned. Those persons who have committed serious crimes and have had repeated convictions are not to be included in the amnesty, the website reported. The web site added that currently healthcare facilities are being contacted about those prisoners to be released who require medical care and in-patient treatment, and details are being worked about travel of those to be released to their former places of residence and employment.

e. Turkmen Ministry of National Security Marks 16th Anniversary

Original title: Turkmen Security Ministry Marks Its Jubilee. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: turkmenistan.ru/09/29/07

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=11168&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: In an address published in all central newspapers September 29, President Berdymukhamedov sent congratulations to Turkmenistan's national security employees, turkmenistan.ru reported. "Over the years of independence, the officers of the Ministry of National Security of Turkmenistan, together with the workers of other law-enforcement agencies have fulfilled tremendous work on strengthening the foundations of state sovereignty, maintaining civic accord in society and unity and consolidation of the people, and combating organized crime," he said.

"In our democratic and legal state there is no place for traitors of the Motherland, those who through slander and calumny try to undermine the foundations of our state, for embezzlers of public property and bribe-takers, for those who cause damage to the health of the nation through drug smuggling, for those who slow down economic development by illegally exported goods. Every citizen of the country must obey the laws adopted in our country", the president warned.

3. ECONOMIC NEWS

a. Turkmen President Discusses Possible Energy Cooperation with U.S. Oil Executive

Original title: US Energy Companies Plan Active Cooperation with Turkmenistan. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: turkmenistan.ru/09/28/07

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=11120&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: While in New York to attend the UN General Assembly, President Berdymukhamedov met with Robert Murphy, head of Midland Oil and Gas October 2, to discuss potential exploration of oil and gas, turkmenistan.ru reported. Murphy said his company was interested in large-scale cooperation in oil and gas investments, the latest technology deliveries and providing drilling and exploration services, turkmenistan.ru reported, citing the State News Agency (TDH).

Murphy proposed sending his specialists to Turkmenistan to study opportunities for cooperation. The Turkmen leader said he was open for cooperation on the basis of mutual benefit.

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